

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02469 161307Z
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S E C R E T BOGOTA 2469

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, CASEC, CASC, CO
SUBJECT: KIDNAPPING OF PC VOLUNTEER

WHEN I WAS PASSING THROUGH CALI ON MY WAY HOME FROM BUENAVENTURA, LAST WEEK, CONSUL ROY APEL IN CALI SET UP AN IMPROMPTU COFFEE CHAT WITH MR. ERIC LEUPIN, HONORARY DUTCH CONSUL WHO SPENT OVER 20 MONTHS IN CUSTODY WITH THE COLOMBIAN REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES (FARC), THE SAME NETWORK OF GUERRILLAS REPORTED TO BE HOLDING PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER RICHARD STARR. MR. LEUPIN IS A CANADIAN BUSINESSMAN RESIDENT IN COLOMBIA FOR MANY YEARS AND MARRIED TO AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. MR. LEUPIN STATED THAT HE HAD READ WITH INTEREST THE ACCOUNTS OF THE KIDNAPPING OF PCV STARR AND OFFERED THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

1. THE FARC IS A GROUP OF MARXIST-LENINIST COLO-
RATION, SELF-STYLED AS AN ARMY OF LIBERATION WHOSE OFT-
REPEATED OBJECTIVES ARE TWO-FOLD: (A) THE FINAL
TAKE-OVER OF THE MECHANISM OF GOVERNMENT IN COLOMBIA,
(B) THE EXPULSION OF ALL FOREIGN FIRMS AND INTERESTS.

2. THE GROUP, MOSTLY ILLITERATE, CONTAINS A CORE GROUP
OF EDUCATED IDEOLOGUES. THEY RECEIVE DAILY INSTRUCTION
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02469 161307Z

ON BASIC SUBJECTS AND ON MARXIST IDEOLOGY.

3. THEY ARE FAIRLY WELL ARMED. EACH "SOLDIER"
CARRIES AT LEAST ONE SIDE ARM AND 50 ROUNDS OF AMMUNI-
TION. THEY HAVE SMALL AUTOMATIC WEAPONS BUT THE MOST
COMMON WEAPON IS THE MI RIFLE. EACH INDIVIDUAL PERIO-
DICALLY RECEIVES A NEW PAIR OF BOOTS (CORYDONS, APPA-

RENTLY MANUFACTURED IN COLOMBIA. IRONICALLY, MR. LEUPIN IS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF THAT FIRM.) EACH MEMBER CARRIES A SUPPLY OF FOOD ON HIS PERSON IN ORDER TO PROVIDE FOR RAPID DISPERSAL SHOULD THEY BE ATTACKED AT ANY TIME.

4. THE "ARMY" OPERATES IN SMALL GROUPS, USUALLY ABOUT 20 MEN. THUS, SHOULD ONE BE AMBUSHED, ANOTHER GROUP CONTINUES THE MARCH. DURING HIS 20 MONTHS WITH THEM MR. LEUPIN WAS NEVER ABLE TO SEE ANYTHING THAT LOOKED LIKE A PERMANENT ENCAMPMENT OR BASE. HIS 20 MONTHS WERE SPENT PRACTICALLY IN THE OPEN IN A HEAVILY WOODED AREA NEAR A RIVER OR STREAM. FOODSTUFFS WERE BROUGHT IN REGULARLY, BUT APPARENTLY WITH A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFICULTY SINCE THE TERRAIN IN WHICH THEY OPERATE IS QUITE MOUNTAINOUS AN DIFFICULT. FISH IS READILY AVAILABLE, ALSO MEAT FROM CONTINOUS HUNTING FORAGES. AT ONE TIME, TWO COWS WERE LEAD OVER THE TREACHEROUS MOUNTAIN PATHS IN ORDER TO HELP FEED LEUPIN.

5. BUILDINGS ARE NEVER CONSTRUCTED. FIRES WERE NEVER BUILT BECAUSE OF SMOKE OR FLAMES. THEY USE CHARCOAL. FOR LONG STOPS SUCH AS THE ONE THEY MADE WITH LEUPIN THEY SET UP PLASTC TENTS WHICH HAVE NO SIDES.

6. PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL HELP IS NOT AVAILABLE. IN SOME OF THEIR RAIDS THEY ACQUIRE SUCH THINGS AS PILLS, ASPIRINS, VITAMINS. LEUPIN WAS PROVIDED
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BOGOTA 02469 161307Z

OCCASIONALLY WITH TOOTHPASTE BUT AS TIME WENT ON HIS TEETH WENT BAD AND SOME HAD TO BE PULLED.

7. LEUPIN DOES NOT FEEL STARR IS IN PHYSICAL DANGER. HE SAID A STRICT CODE OF CONDUCT IS EMPLOYED AND PRISONERS ARE TREATED AS WELL AS POSSIBLE UNDER THE PRIMITIVE CIRCUMSTANCES. HE WAS ONLY TIED UP ONCE, AND THIS WAS WHEN HE ATTEMPTED TOESCAPE. HE WAS NOT PUNISHED. HE RECEIVED CONSTANT LECTURES ON THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GROUP. MOST OF THE INSTRUCTION WAS CONDUCTED BY WHAT APPEARED TO BE A YOUND UNIVERSITY STUDENT.

8. IN LEUPIN'S CASE THE GROUP ORIGINALLY DEMANDED A RANSOM OF ONE MILLION DOLLARS FROM THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT. THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT REFUSED. THE RANSOM FINALLY PAID (MR. LEUPIN DECLINED TO SAY BY WHOM) WAS ONE MILLION COLOMBIAN PESOS.

9. MR. LEUPIN FEELS THAT NOT MUCH CAN BE DONE UNTIL SOME SORT OF CONTACT IS MADE WITH US. HE SAID THEY DO NOT HAVE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS: ONLY SMALL RADIOS FOR LISTENING TO COMMERCIAL STATIONS. HE IS NOT SURE EXACTLY WHAT THEY WILL DO WHEN THEY FIND OUT THAT STARR IS A VERY SICK YOUNG MAN. HE IS POSITIVE IN HIS OWN MIND THAT DEMANDS FOR RANSOM WILL BE MADE, BUT IT IS HIS OPINION THAT THEIR FIRST CONTACT - OR ATTEMPT AT SUCH - MAY BE MONTHS AWAY. HE SAID THAT IN HIS CASE FOUR MONTHS TRANSPIRED BEFORE THE FIRST CONTACT.

10. LEUPIN FEELS THAT ANY ATTEMPT TO RESCUE HIM BY ARMED FORCES WOULD BE FATAL. FARC MEMBERS SEEM ALMOST FANATICAL IN THEIR BELIEFS AND TO THEM LIFE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE THE KIND OF COMMODITY WE REGARD IT TO BE.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BOGOTA 02469 161307Z

11. MONTHS AFTER HE WAS KIDNAPPED LEUPIN'S MOTHER CAME TO COLOMBIA BECAUSE SHE HAD WRITTEN A LETTER OF APPEAL TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND PRESIDENT LOPEZ ANSWERED HER THAT ALTHOUGH IT WAS TRUE HER SON HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED BY COLOMBIANS HE WAS IN FACT BEING HELD IN ECUADOR. ON HER ARRIVAL HERE SHE ISSUED AN APPEAL OVER COMMERCIAL RADIO PLEADING FOR HER SON'S LIFE. IT HAD LITTLE EFFECT. THE FARC MADE IT PLAIN THAT THEY NEEDED RESOURCES AND THAT IT WAS RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT IF THEY HELD LEUPIN FOR TWO MONTHS OR TWO YEARS.

12. THE LEADER IN CHARGE OF THE GROUP HOLDING LEUPIN WAS CALLED "BALIN". BUT IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE OCCASIONALLY TRAVELLED TO ANOTHER SITE TO RECEIVE AND PROCESS ORDERS FROM SOMEONE ELSE HIGHER UP. AT ONE TIME HE OVERHEARD THEM TALK ABOUT THE ASSASSINATION OF A LABOR LEADER BY URBAN GUERRILLAS IN BOGOTA. (APPARENTLY THIS WAS IN REFERENCE TO KILLING OF MERCADO BY M-19.) THEY CHARACTERIZED THAT GROUP AS "CRUDE, CRIMINALS".

13. FINALLY, MR. LEUPIN THANKED ME FOR MY VISIT AND HE EXPRESSED HIS SYMPATHY FOR OUR PLIGHT. HE AGREED THAT IT WOULD BE BEST THAT NO ONE KNOW OF MY VISIT TO HIM LEST IT BE MISCONSTRUED AS AN APPROACH TO NEGOTIATE. HE DID, HOWEVER, MAKE HIMSELF AVAILABLE SHOULD WE REQUIRE ANY FURTHER BACKGROUND ON THE GROUP WHICH HELD HIM.
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